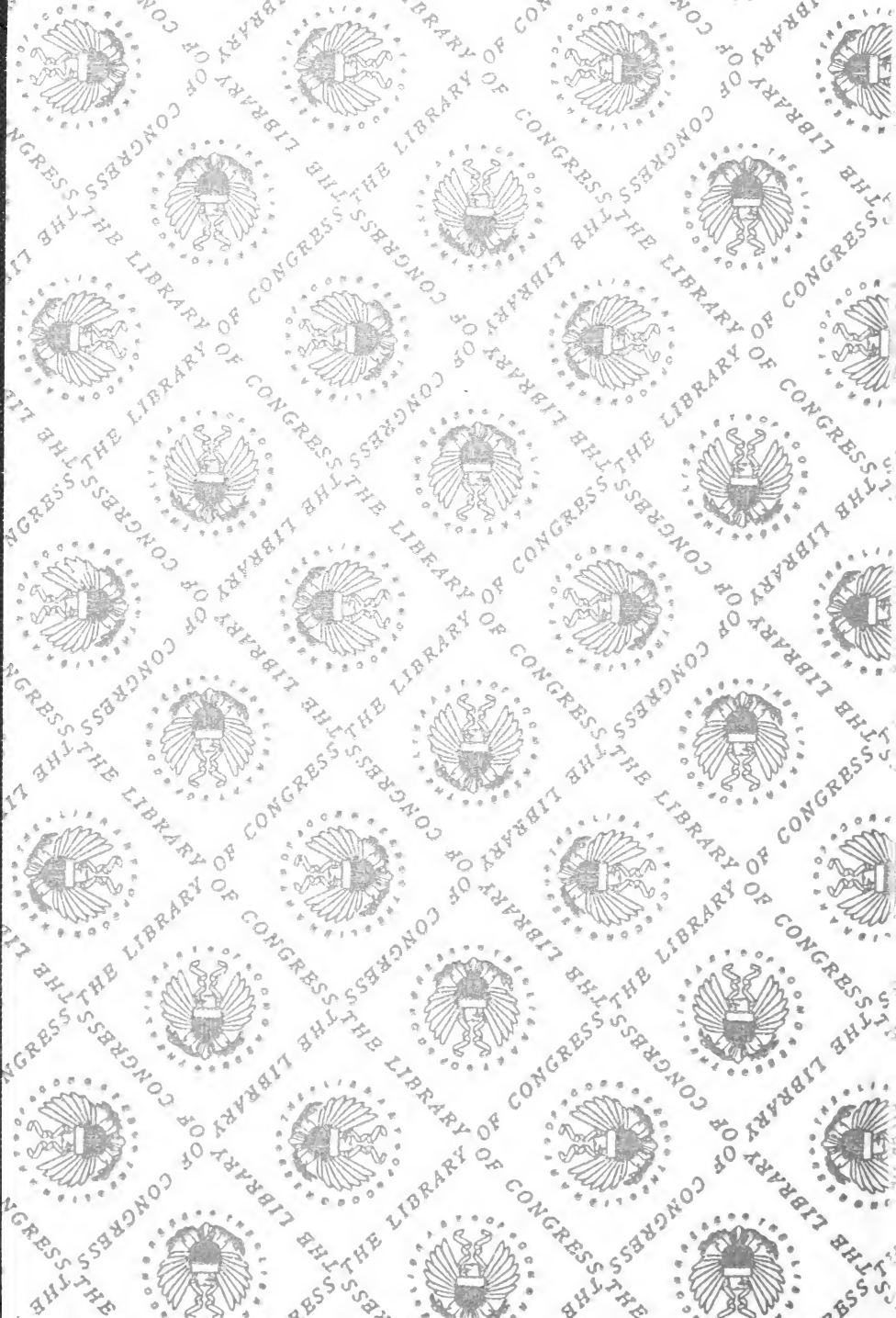
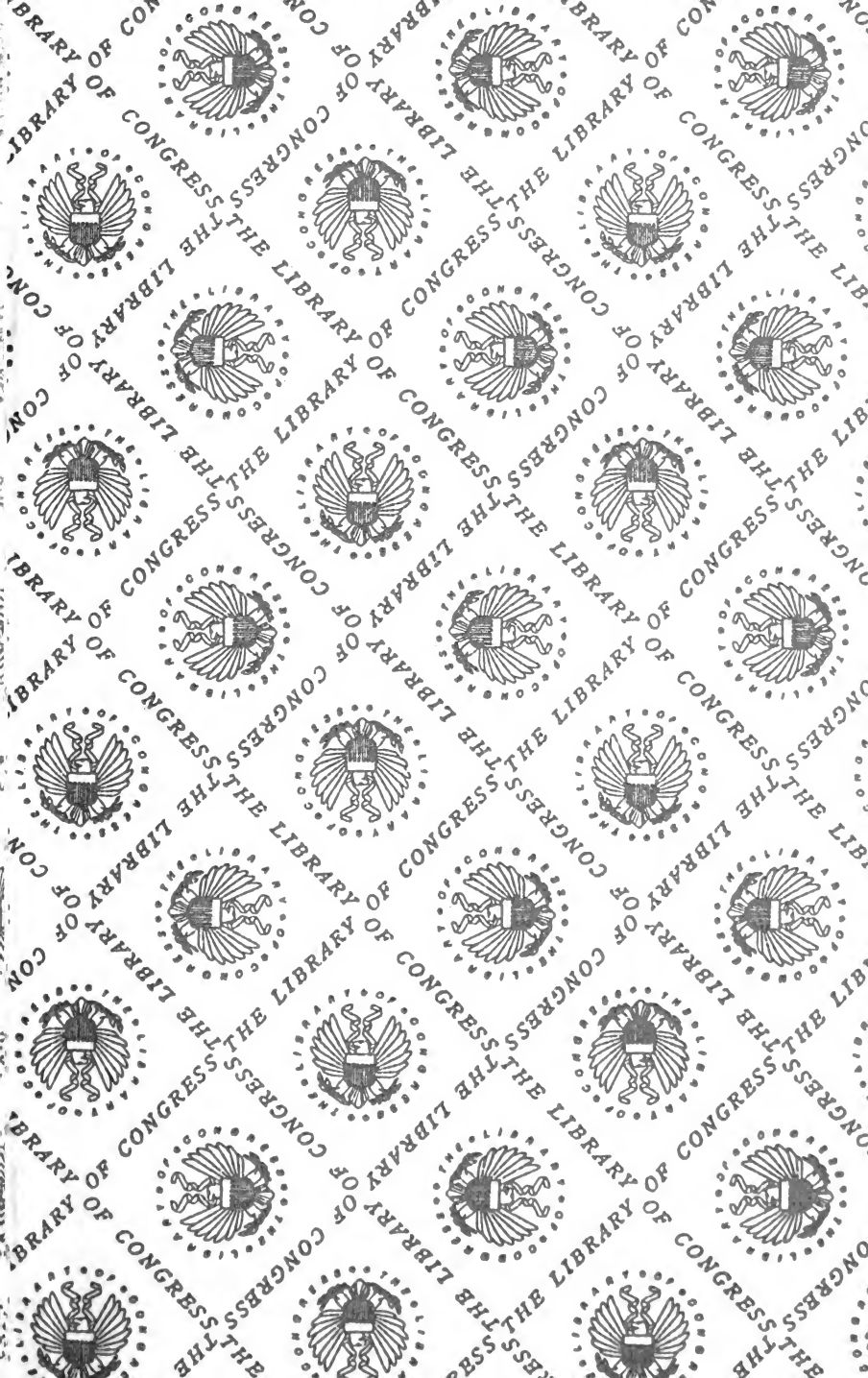
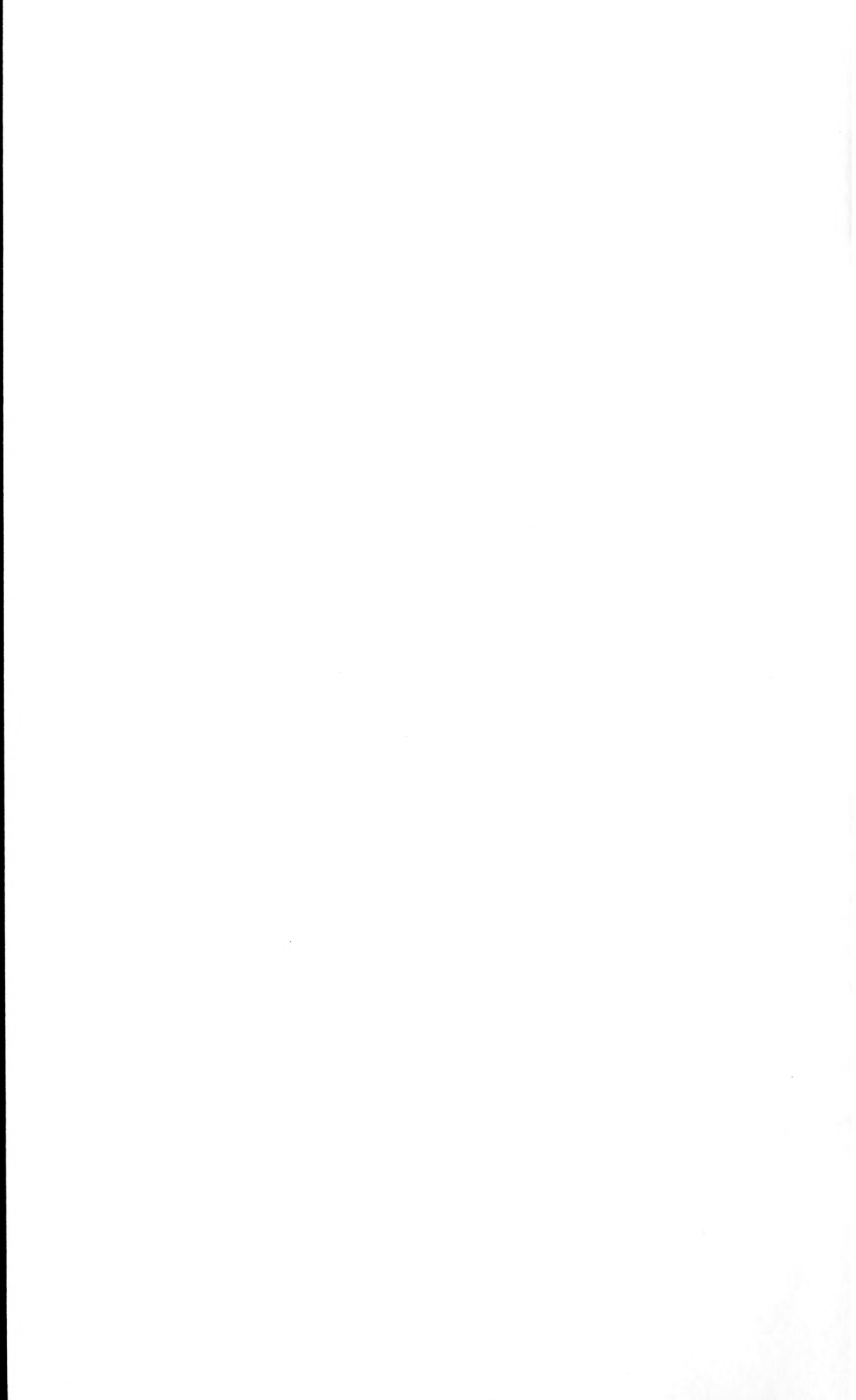


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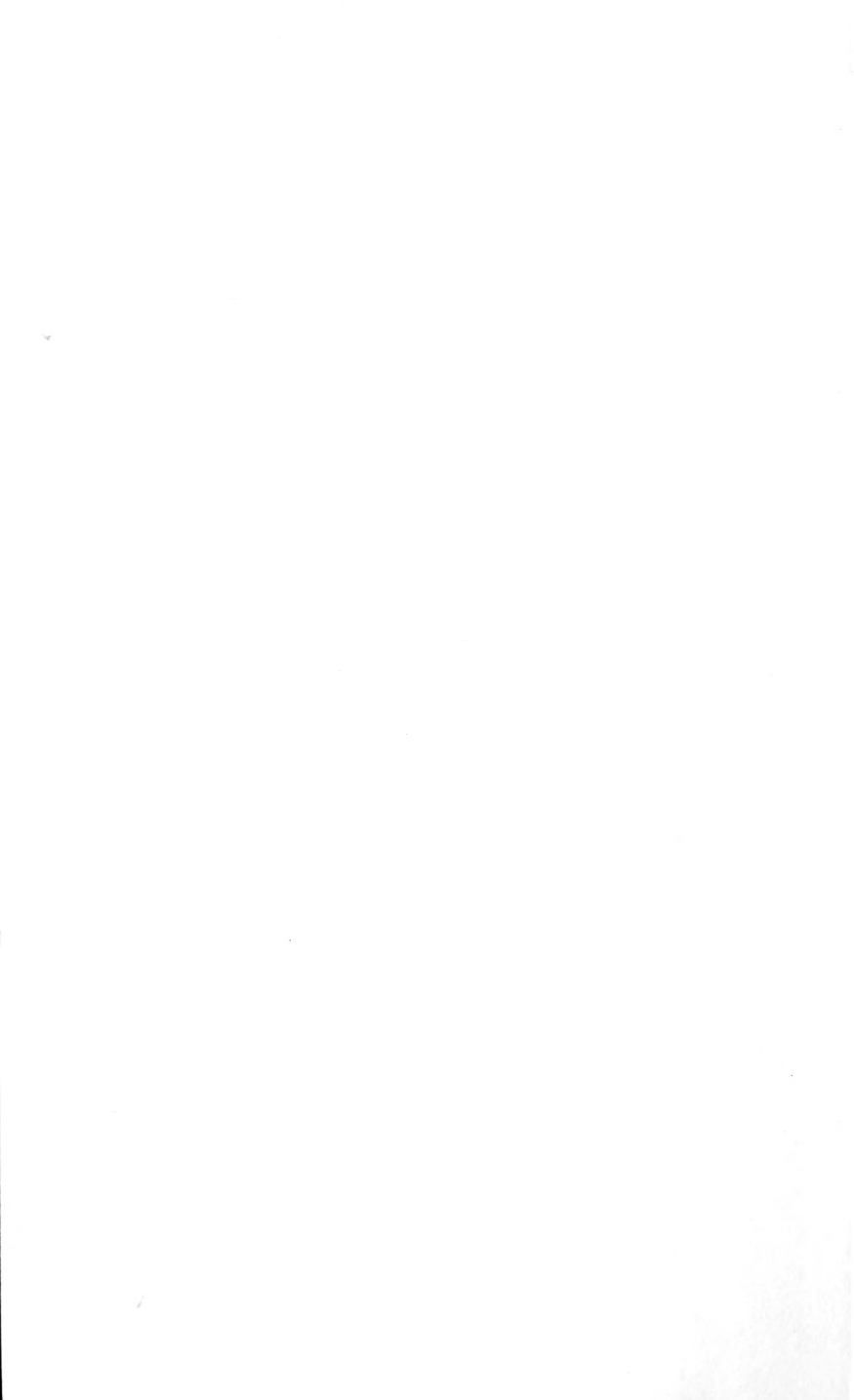
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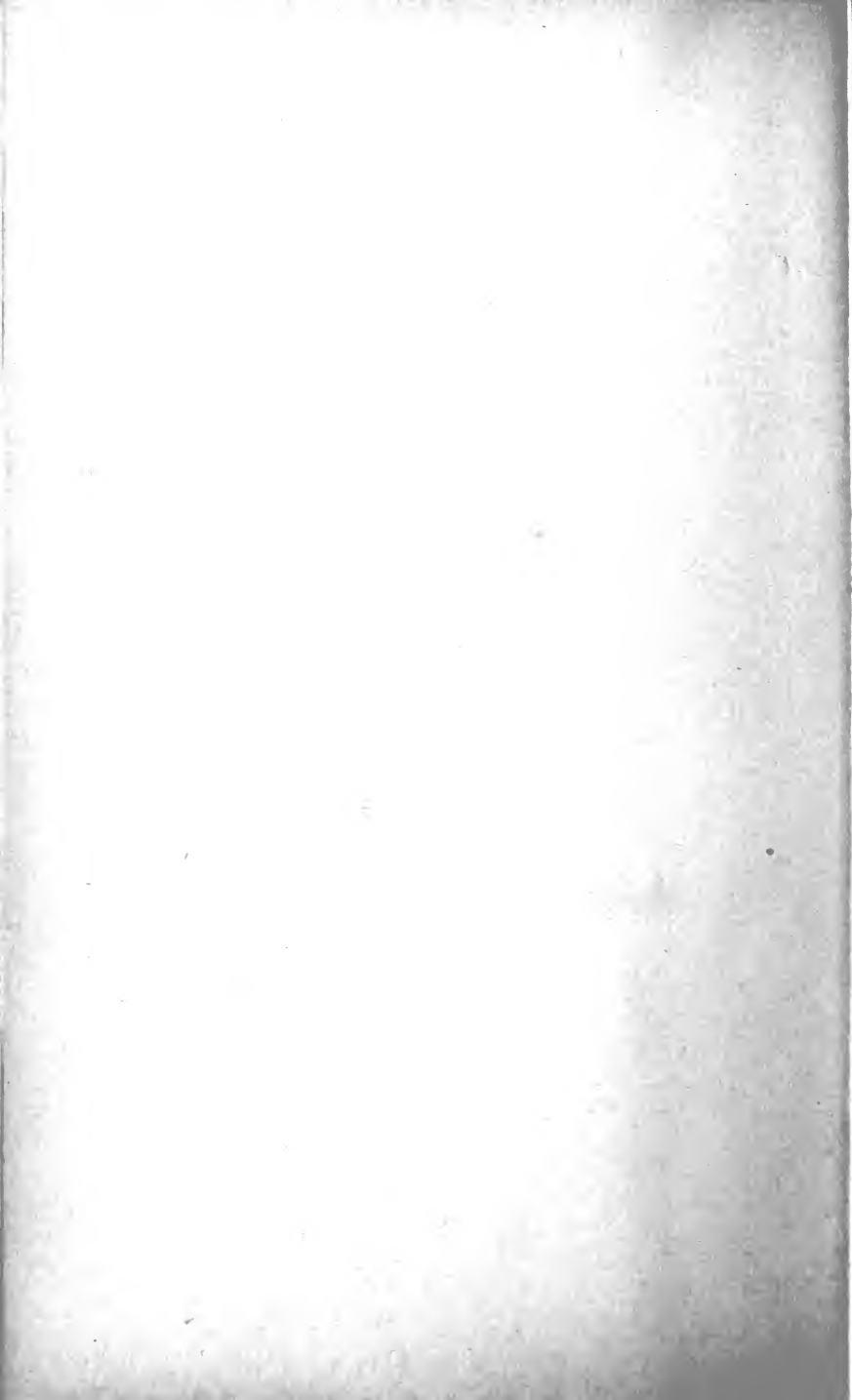
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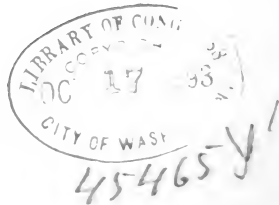
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THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTI-  
ANITY TO OTHER RELIGIONS

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BY REV. JAMES S. DENNIS D.D.

*Of the Presbyterian Mission, Beirut, Syria, Student's Lec-  
turer on Missions, Princeton Theological Seminary, Au-  
thor of Foreign Missions after a Century.*



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## THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTI- ANITY TO OTHER RELIGIONS.

Christianity speaks in the name of God. To Him it owes its existence, and the deep secret of its dignity and power is that it reveals Him. It would be effrontery for it to speak simply upon its own responsibility or even in the name of reason. It has no naturalistic philosophy of its own evolution to propound. It has a message from God to deliver. It is not itself a philosophy; it is a religion. It is not earth-born; it is God-wrought. It comes not from man, but from God, and is intensely alive with His power, alert with His love, benign with His goodness, radiant with His light, charged with His truth, sent with His message, inspired with His energy, regnant with His wisdom, instinct with the gift of spiritual healing, and mighty with supreme authority.

It has a mission among men whenever or wherever it finds them, which is as sublime as creation, as marvelous as spiritual existence and, as full of mysterious meaning as eternity. It finds its focus and as well its radiating center in the personality of Jesus Christ, its great Revealer and Teacher, to whom before His advent all the fingers of light pointed, and from whom since His incarnation all the brightness of the day has shone. It has a further and supplemental historic basis in the Holy Scriptures which God has been pleased to give through inspired writers chosen and commissioned by Him. Its message is much more than Judaism; it is infinitely more than the revelation of nature; it is even more than the best teachings of all other religions combined, for whatever is good and true in other religious systems is found in full and authoritative form in Christianity. It has wrought in love, with the touch of regeneration, with the inspiration of prophetic vision, in the mastery of spiritual control, and by the transforming power of the divine indwelling, until its own best evidence is what it has done



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to uplift and purify wherever it has been welcomed among men.

I say welcomed, for Christianity must be received in order to accomplish its mission. It is addressed to the reason and the heart of man, but does no violence to liberty. Its limitations are not in its own nature, but in the freedom which God has planted in man. It is not to be judged, therefore, by what it has achieved in the world, except as the world has voluntarily received it. The sins of Christian nations cannot be rightly charged to Christianity, for it does not sanction but forbids them. So-called Christian nations sometimes do frightfully un-Christian things, or at least allow them to be done, and for this they will be called to give an account by the God of justice and judgment. Where Christianity is not known, or where it has been ignore and rejected, it withholds the evidence of its power, but where it has been accepted it does not shrink from the test but rather triumphs in its achievements. Its attitude towards mankind is marked by gracious urgency, not compulsion; by gentle condescension, not pride;

by kindly ministry, not harshness; by faithful warning, not taunting reproaches; by plain instruction, not argument; by gentle and quiet command, not noisy harangue; by limitless promises to faith, not spectacular gifts to sight.

It has a message of supreme import to man, fresh from the heart of God. It records the great spiritual facts of human history, it announces the perils and needs of man, it reveals the mighty resources of redemption, it solves the problems and blesses the discipline of life, it teaches the whole secret of regeneration and hope and moral triumph, it brings to the world the co-operation of divine wisdom in the great struggle with the dark mysteries of misery and suffering. Its message to the world is so full of quickening inspiration, so resplendent with light, so charged with power, so effective in its ministry that its mission can be characterized only by the use of the most majestic symbolism of the natural universe. It is indeed, as revealed in the person of its founder, the "Sun of righteousness arising with healing in his wings."

We are asked now to consider the message

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of Christianity to other religions. If it has a message to a sinful world, it must also have a message to other religions which are seeking to minister to the same fallen race and to accomplish in their own way and by diverse methods the very mission God has designed should be Christianity's privilege and high function to discharge.

Let us seek now to catch the *spirit* of that message and to indicate in brief outline its *purport*. We must be content simply to give the message; the limits of this paper forbid any attempt to vindicate it, or to demonstrate its historic integrity, its heavenly wisdom, and its excellent glory.

#### THE SPIRIT OF THE MESSAGE.

Its spirit is full of simple sincerity, exalted dignity, and sweet unselfishness. It aims to impart a blessing, rather than to challenge a comparison. It is not so anxious to vindicate itself as to confer its benefits. It is not so solicitous to secure supreme honor for itself as to win its way to the heart. It does not seek to taunt, or disparage, or humiliate a rival,

but rather to subdue by love, attract by its own excellence, and supplant by virtue of its own incomparable superiority. It is itself incapable of a spirit of rivalry, because of its own invincible right to reign. It has no use for a sneer, it can dispense with contempt, it carries no weapons of violence, it is not given to argument, it is incapable of trickery or deceit, and it repudiates cant. It relies ever upon its own intrinsic merit, and bases all its claims upon its right to be heard and honored.

Its miraculous evidence is rather an exception than a rule. It was a sign to help weak faith. It was a concession made in a spirit of condescension. Miracles suggest mercy quite as much as they announce majesty. When we consider the unlimited scope of divine power, and the ease with which signs and wonders might have been multiplied in bewildering variety and impressiveness, we are conscious of a rigid conservation of power and a distinct repudiation of the spectacular. The mystery of Christian history is the sparing way in which Christianity has used its resources. It is a tax upon faith which is often

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painfully severe to note the apparent lack of energy and dash and resistless force in the seemingly slow advances of our holy religion.

Doubtless God has His reasons, but in the meanwhile we cannot but recognize in Christianity a spirit of mysterious reserve, of marvelous patience, of subdued undertone, of purposeful restraint. It does not "cry nor lift up, nor cause its voice to be heard in the street." Centuries come and go and Christianity touches only portions of the earth, but wherever it touches it transfigures. It seems to despise material adjuncts, and to count only those victories worth having which are won through direct spiritual contact with the individual soul. Its relations to other religions has been characterized by singular reserve, and its progress has been marked by an unostentatious dignity, which is in harmony with the majestic attitude of God its author, to all false gods who have claimed divine honors and sought to usurp the place which was His alone.

Christianity is said to be intolerant. I do not think the word is well chosen; it would be

more true to say that Christianity is uncompromising, and it is uncompromising because it is true. It is as absurd to complain of the uncompromising nature of Christianity as it is to speak contemptuously of the inflexible character of natural law. Christianity at the same time that it is uncompromising, is tolerant of the convictions of others in a kindly and generous spirit, and if true to itself it would be the last religion in the world to stifle liberty of conscience, or deny all proper freedom of speech. I regard the tolerance, patience and meekness of Christianity in this Parliament as simply sublime. God give us wisdom and grace to maintain them to the end. Its tolerance should ever be marked by gentleness, patience and courtesy; its exclusiveness should be characterized by dignity, magnanimity and charity. It should be the steel hand of truth encased in the velvet glove of love.

We are right then in speaking of the spirit of this message as wholly free from the commonplace sentiment of rivalry, entirely above the use of spectacular or meretricious

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methods, infinitely removed from all mere device or dramatic effect, wholly free from cant or double-facedness, with no anxiety for alliance with worldly power or social eclat, caring more for a place of influence in an humble heart than for a seat of power on a royal throne, wholly intent upon claiming the loving allegiance of the soul, and securing the moral transformation of charcter, in order that its own spirit and principles may sway the spiritual life of men.

It speaks then to other religions with unqualified frankness and plainness based upon its incontrovertible claim to a hearing; it has nothing to conceal, but rather invites to inquiry and investigation; it recognizes promptly and cordially whatever is worthy of respect in other religious systems; it acknowledges the undoubted sincerity of personal conviction and the intense and pathetic earnestness of moral struggle in the case of many serious souls who, like the Athenians of old, "worship in ignorance;" it warns and persuades and commands as is its right; it speaks as Paul did in the presence of cultured heathenism on

Mars Hill, of that appointed day in which the world must be judged and of "that man" by whom it is to be judged; it echoes and re-echoes its invariable and inflexible call to repentance; it requires acceptance of its moral standards, and exacts submission, loyalty, reverence, and humility.

All this it does with a superb and unwavering tone of quiet insistence. It often presses its claim with argument, appeal, and tender urgency, yet in it all and through it all would be recognized a clear, resonant, predominant tone of uncompromising insistence, revealing that supreme personal will which originated Christianity, and in whose name it ever speaks. It delivers its message with an air of untroubled confidence and quiet mastery. There is no anxiety about precedence, no undue care for externals, no apology for mysteries, no bargaining for compliments, no possibility of being patronized, no undignified spirit of competition. It speaks rather with the consciousness of that simple, natural, incomparable, measureless supremacy which quickly disarms rivalry, and in the end challenges the admi-



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ration and compels the submission of hearts free from malice and guile.

#### THE PURPORT OF THE MESSAGE.

This being the spirit of the message let us inquire as to its *purport*. There is one immensely preponderating element here which pervades the whole content of the message—it is love for man. Christianity is full of it. This is its supreme meaning to the world—not that love eclipses or shadows every other attribute in God's character, but that it glorifies and more perfectly reveals and interprets the nature of God and the history of His dealings with man. The object of this love must be carefully noted—it is mankind—the race considered as individuals or as a whole. Christianity unfolds a message to other religions which emphasizes this heavenly principle. It reveals therein the secret of its power and the unique wonder of its whole redemptive system. "Never man spake like this man," was said of Christ. Never religion spake like this religion, may be said of Christianity.

The Christian system is conceived in love; it

is wrought out by love; it brings the provision of love to fallen man; it administers its marvelous functions in love; it introduces man into an atmosphere of love; it gives him the inspiration, the joy, the fruition of love; it leads at last into the realm of eternal love. While accomplishing this end, at the same time it convicts of sin, it melts into humility, it quickens gratitude, it purifies and sanctifies the heart, it glorifies the character, it inspires to obedience, it implants the instincts of service, it introduces a regenerating agent into social life, it teaches unselfishness as the great lesson of heaven to earth, and it proposes love as itself the supreme remedy for the woes and wrongs of the world. It has also its message of warning and judgment, which must not be ignored. It speaks in the name of justice, holiness, and eternal sovereignty of the final issue of that folly which rejects its proposals and appeals, and defies its authority. In this it also reveals God and vindicates His honor, and it is sadly true that he who slights its message of love must finally face its sentence of condemnation.

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Let us look at this message more in detail. In presenting it under present auspices our purpose is not so distinctively controversial as declarative. We do not seek to challenge or rebuke, much less to denounce and condemn other religions, but rather to unfold in calm statement the essential features of the message which Christianity is charged to deliver. This is not the place or time to sit in judgment; it is rather an opportunity for each religion to unfold its distinctive tenets, and declare its innermost secrets of wisdom and spiritual helpfulness to man in that spirit of courtesy which is becoming in what may be regarded as a conference upon comparative religion. We who love and revere Christianity believe that it declares the whole counsel of God, and we are content to rest our case upon the simple statement of its historic facts, its spiritual teaching, and its unrivalled ministry to the world. Christianity is its own best evidence; its very presence is full of power; its spiritual contribution to the thought of the world is its supreme credential; its exemplification in the life of its Founder, and, to a less

conspicuous degree of all who are truly in His likeness, is its unanswerable demonstration.

I have sought to give the essential outlines of this immortal message of Christianity by grouping its leading characteristics in a series of code words which when presented in combination give the distinctive signal of the Christian religion which has waved aloft in sunshine and storm during all the centuries since the New Testament Scriptures were given to man.

#### FATHERHOOD.

The initial word which we place in this signal code of Christianity is *Fatherhood*. This may have a strange sound to some ears, but to the Christian it is full of sweetness and dignity. It simply means that the creative act of God, so far as our human family is concerned, was done in the spirit of fatherly love and goodness. He created us in His likeness, and to express this idea of spiritual resemblance and tender relationship the symbolical term of fatherhood is used. When Christ taught us to pray, "Our Father," in the spirit

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not only of natural but of gracious sonship, He gave us a lesson which transcends human philosophy and has in it so much of the height and depth of divine feeling that human reason has hardly dared to fully receive, much less to originate, the conception.

#### BROTHERHOOD.

A second word which is representative in the Christian message is, *Brotherhood*. This exists in two senses—there is the universal brotherhood of man to man, as children of one Father in whose likeness the whole family is created, and the spiritual brotherhood of union in Christ. We are all brother men, would that we were also all brother Christians. Here again the suggestion is love as the rule and sign of human as well as Christian fellowship. The world has drifted far away from this ideal of brotherhood; it has been repudiated in some quarters even in the name of religion, and it seems clear that it will never be fully recognized and exemplified except as the spirit of Christ assumes its sway over the hearts of men.

## REDEMPTION.

The next code word of Christianity is Redemption. We use it here in the sense of a purpose on God's part to deliver man from sin, and to make a universal provision for that end, which if rightly used insures the result. I need not remind you that this purpose is conceived in love. God as Redeemer has taken a gracious attitude towards man from the beginnings of history, and He is "not far from every one" in the immanence and omnipresence of His love. Redemption is a world-embracing term; it is not limited to any age or class. Its potentiality is world-wide; its efficiency is unrestrained, except as man himself limits it; its application is determined by the sovereign wisdom of God, its Author, who deals with each individual as a possible candidate for redemption, and decides his destiny in accordance with his spiritual attitude towards Christ. Where Christ is unknown God still exercises His sovereignty, although He has been pleased to maintain a significant reserve as to the possibility, extent, and spiritual tests of redemption where trust is based

upon God's mercy in general, rather than upon His mercy as specially revealed in Christ. We know from His Word that Christ's sacrifice is infinite. God can apply its saving benefits to one who intelligently accepts it in faith, or to an infant who receives its benefits as a sovereign gift, or to one who not having known of Christ so casts himself upon God's mercy that divine wisdom sees good reason to exercise the prerogative of compassion and apply to the soul the saving power of the great sacrifice.

#### INCARNATION.

Another cardinal idea in the Christian system is *Incarnation*. God clothing Himself in human form and coming into living touch with mankind. This He did in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is a mighty mystery, and Christianity would never dare assert it except as God has taught her its truth. Granted the purpose of God to reveal Himself in visible form to man, He must be free to choose His own method. He did not consult human reason. He did not ask the advice of philosophy. He did not seek the permis-

sion of ordinary laws. He came in His spiritual chariot in the glory of the supernatural, but He entered the realm of human life through the humble gateway of nature. He came not only to reveal God, but to bring Him into contact with human life. He came to assume permanent relations to the race. His brief life among us upon earth was for a purpose, and when that was accomplished, still retaining His humanity, He ascended to assume His kingly dominion in the heavens.

#### ATONEMENT.

We are brought now to another fundamental truth in the Christian message—the mysterious doctrine of *Atonement*. Sin is a fact which is indisputable. It is universally recognized and acknowledged. It is its own evidence. It is moreover, a barrier between man and his God. The divine holiness and sin with its loathsomeness, its rebellion, its horrid degradation, and its hopeless ruin, cannot coalesce in any system of moral government. God cannot tolerate sin or temporize with it, or make a place for it in His presence.



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He cannot parley with it; He must punish it. He cannot treat with it; He must try it at the bar. He cannot overlook it; He must overcome it. He cannot give it a moral status; He must visit it with the condemnation it deserves. Atonement is God's marvelous method of vindicating once for all before the universe His eternal attitude towards sin, by the voluntary self-assumption in the spirit of sacrifice of its penalty. This He does in the person of Jesus Christ, who came as God incarnate upon this sublime mission. The facts of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection, take their place in the realm of veritable history, and the moral value and propitiatory efficacy of His perfect obedience and sacrificial death in a representative capacity become a mysterious element of limitless worth in the process of readjusting the relation of the sinner to His God. Christ is recognized by God as a substitute. The merit of His obedience and the exalted dignity of His sacrifice are both available to faith. The sinner, humble, penitent, and conscious of unworthiness, accepts Christ as

his Redeemer, his Mediator, his Intercessor, his Saviour, and simply believes in Him, trusting in His assurances and promises, based as they are upon His atoning intervention, and receives from God as the gift of sovereign love all the benefits of Christ's mediatorial work.

This is God's way of reaching the goal of pardon and reconciliation. It is His way of being Himself just, and yet accomplishing the justification of the sinner. Here again we have the mystery of love in its most intense form, and the mystery of wisdom in its most august exemplification. This is the heart of the Gospel. It throbs with mysterious love; it pulsates with ineffable throes of divine feeling; it bears a vital relation to the whole scheme of government; it is in its hidden activities beyond the scrutiny of human reason, but it sends the life blood coursing through history, and it gives to Christianity its superb vitality and its undying vigor. It is because Christianity eliminates sin from the problem that its solution is complete and final.

#### CHARACTER.

We pass now to another word of vital im-

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port—it is *Character*. God's own attitude to the sinner being settled and the problems of moral government solved, the next matter which presents itself is the personality of the individual man. It must be purified, transformed into the spiritual likeness of Christ, trained for immortality. It must be brought into harmony with the ethical standards of Christ. This Christianity insists upon, and for the accomplishment of this end it is gifted with an influence and impulse, a potency and winsomeness, an inspiration and helpfulness, which is full of spiritual mastery over the soul. Herein is hidden the secret of the new birth by the Spirit of God. Christianity thus regenerates, uplifts, transforms, and eventually transfigures the personal character. It is an incomparable school of transcendent ethics. It honors the rugged training of discipline, and uses it freely but tenderly. It accomplishes its purpose by exacting obedience, by teaching submission, by helping to self-control, by insisting upon practical righteousness as a rule of life, and by introducing the Golden Rule as the law of contact and duty between man and man.

## SERVICE.

In vital connection with character is a word of magnetic impulse and unique glory which gives to Christianity a sublime, practical power in history. It is *Service*. Here is a forceful element in the double influence of Christianity over the inner life and the outward ministry of its followers. Christ, its Founder, glorified service and lifted it in His own experience to the dignity of sacrifice. In the light of Christ's example service becomes an honor, a privilege, and a moral triumph; it is consummated and crowned in sacrifice. Christianity, receiving its lesson from Christ, subsidizes character in the interest of service. It lays its noblest fruitage of personal gifts and spiriutal culture upon the altar of philanthropic beneficence. It is unworthy of its name if it does not reproduce this spirit of its Master; only by giving itself to benevolent ministry as Christ gave Himself for the world can it vindicate its origin. Christianity recognizes no worship which is altogether divorced from work for the weal of others. It endorses no religious professions which are unmindful

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of the obligations of service; it allows itself to be tested not simply by the purity of its motives but by the measure of its sacrifice. The crown and the goal of its followers is, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

#### FELLOWSHIP.

One other word completes the code. It is *Fellowship*, of which the Spirit of God is the blessed medium. It is a word which breathes the sweetest hope, suggests the choicest privilege, and sounds the highest destiny of the Christian. It gives the grandest possible meaning to eternity, for it suggests that it is to be passed with God. It illumines and transfigures the present, for it brings God into it, and places Him in living touch with our lives, and makes Him a helper in our moral struggles, our spiritual aspirations, and our heroic though imperfect efforts to live the life of duty. It is solace in trouble, consolation in sorrow, strength in weakness, courage in trial, help in weariness, and cheer in loneliness; it becomes an unfailing inspiration when human nature left to its own resources

would lie down in despair and die. Fellowship with God implies and secures fellowship with each other in a mystical spiritual union of Christ with His people and His people with each other. An invisible society of regenerate souls, which we call the Kingdom of God among men, is the result. This has its visible product in the organized society of the Christian Church, which is the chosen and honored instrument of God for the conservation and propagation of Christianity among men.

This then, is the message which Christianity signals to other religions as it greets them today: FATHERHOOD, BROTHERHOOD, REDEMPTION, INCARNATION, ATONEMENT, CHARACTER, SERVICE, FELLOWSHIP.

It remains to be said that Christianity through the individual seeks to reach society. Its aim is first the man, then men. It is pledged to do for the race what it does for the individual man. Its plans are elastic, expansive, inclusive; it preempts the round earth as its sphere of activity; it ignores no class or rank; it forgets no tribe or nation; it is charged to minister in God's name to the

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world. It is commissioned, aye, commanded by its great Founder to disciple all nations. In this service it blesses and is blessed; in this ministry it uplifts and is itself uplifted; in the accomplishment of this noble mission it will finally be forever vindicated and crowned.





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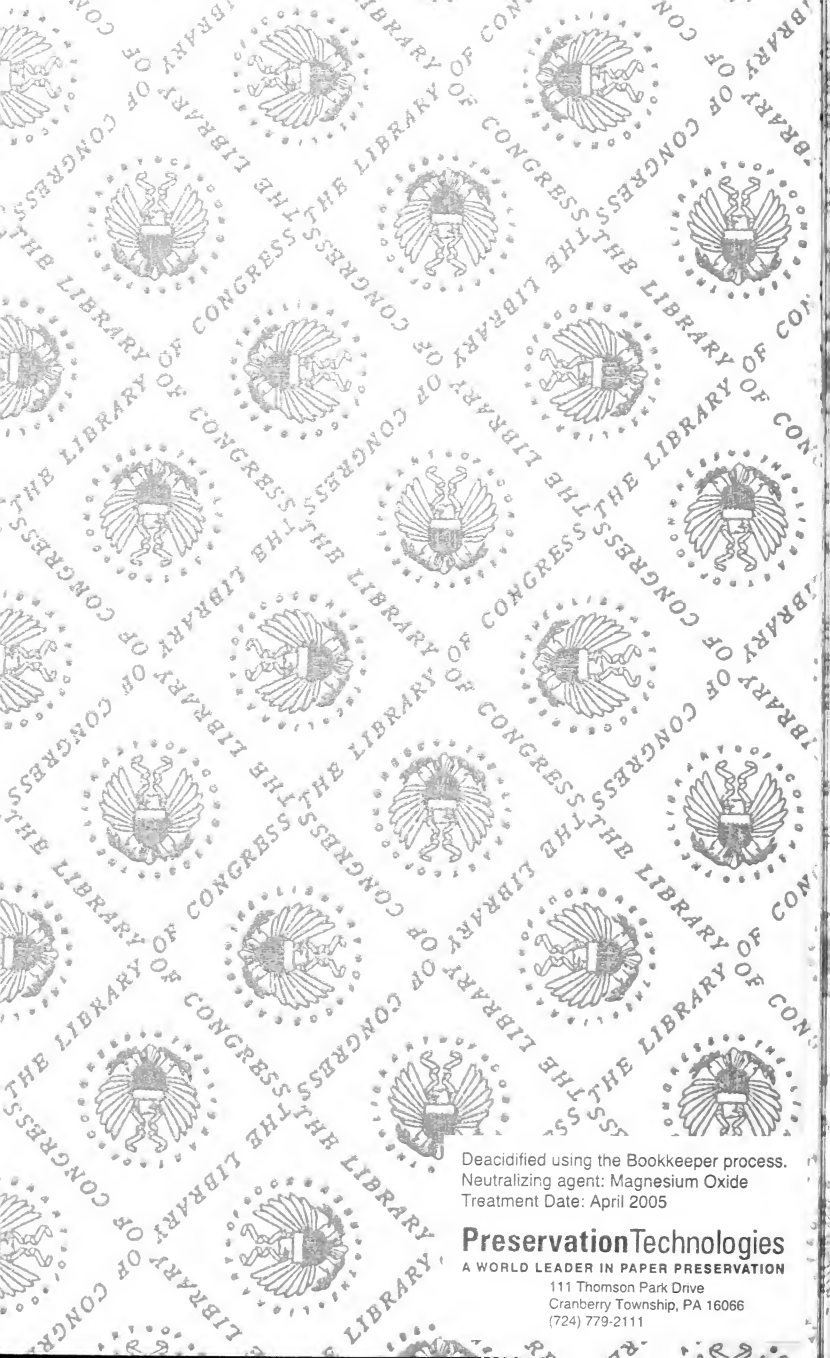
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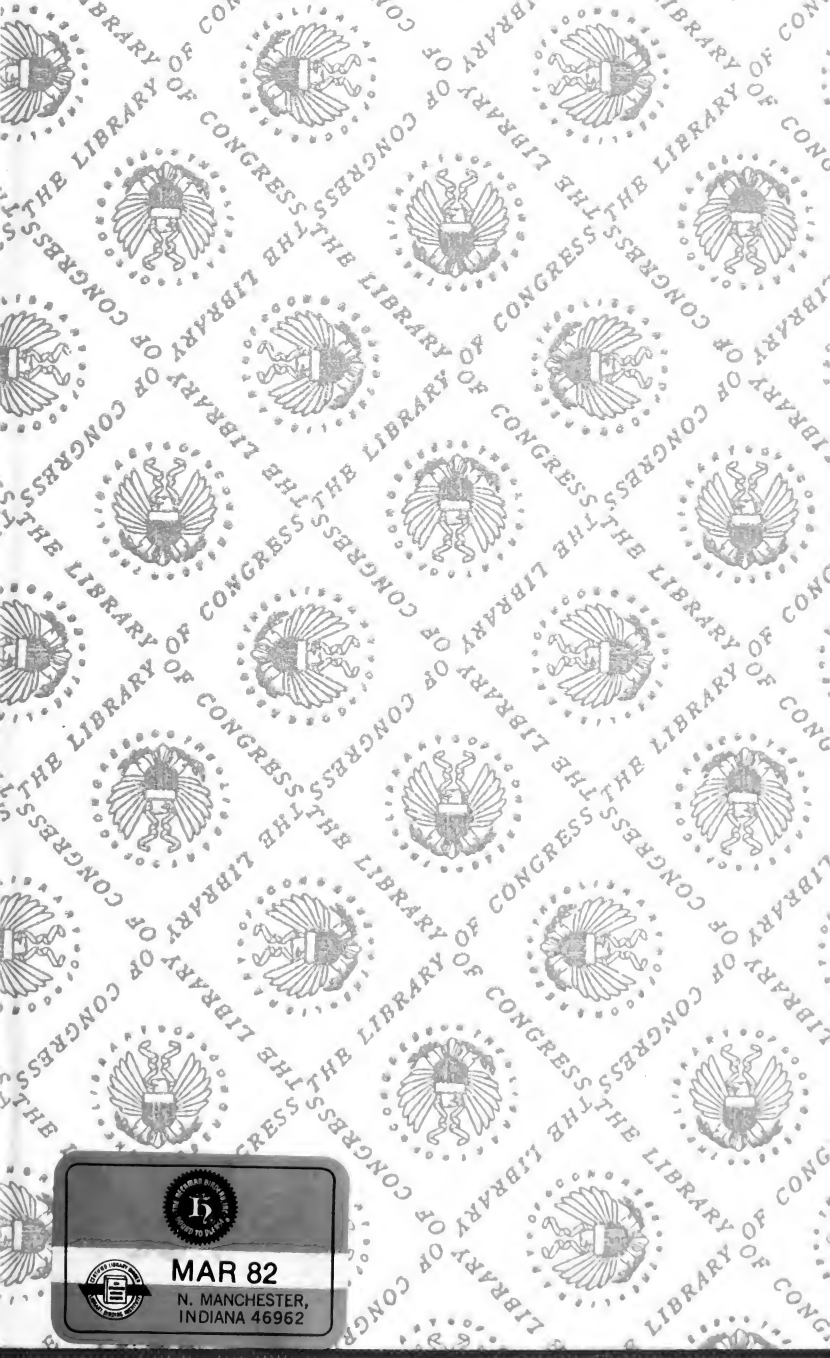


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